

We claim:

1. A method of controlling a sensor in an automotive vehicle, said method comprising the steps of:

establishing a vehicle operational criteria associated with a vehicle operational safety feature;

determining a sensor beam coverage area for said vehicle operational criteria or said vehicle operational safety feature;

receiving a status parameter representing the operational status of said vehicle; and

activating said sensor for scanning said sensor beam coverage area when said status parameter meets said vehicle operational criteria.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said sensor beam coverage area comprises front and side regions of said vehicle.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein said sensor includes a plurality of sensing beams for defining a frontal and side coverage area.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said sensor beam coverage area comprises a 180 degree coverage area from an origination point.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said sensor beam coverage area comprises a 270 degree coverage area from an origination point.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said status parameter represents a gear selected by an operator.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said status parameter represents a speed of said vehicle.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said operational safety feature comprises one of adaptive cruise control, parking assistance, pre-crash sensing or airbag pre-arming.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein said vehicle operational safety feature is selected by an operator.

10. A method of controlling a sensor in an automotive vehicle having a plurality of frontal vehicle operational safety features and a plurality of side vehicle operational safety features to be activated depending on the presence of a remote object, said method comprising the steps of:

establishing a vehicle operational criteria associated with each of said plurality of both frontal and side vehicle operational safety features;

determining a sensor beam coverage area for each of said plurality of vehicle operational criteria or said frontal and side vehicle operational safety features, said sensor beam coverage area comprising frontal and side regions of said vehicle;

receiving a status parameter representing the operational status of said vehicle; and

activating said sensor for scanning selected sensor beam coverage areas when said status parameter meets one of said vehicle operational criteria, said sensor scanning said selected sensor beam coverage areas on a time-interleaved basis.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein said sensor beam coverage area comprises a 180 degree coverage area from an origination point.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein said sensor beam coverage area comprises a 270 degree coverage area from an origination point.

13. The method of claim 10, wherein said status parameter represents a gear selected by an operator.

14. The method of claim 10, wherein said status parameter represents a speed of said vehicle.

15. The method of claim 10, wherein said vehicle operational safety feature comprises one of adaptive cruise control, parking assistance, pre-crash sensing or airbag pre-arming.

16. The method of claim 10, wherein said vehicle operational safety feature is selected by an operator.

17. A method of controlling a sensor in an automotive vehicle having a plurality of vehicle operational safety features to be activated depending on the presence of a remote object, said method comprising the steps of:

providing a set of vehicle operational safety features corresponding to the presence of frontal remote objects;

providing a set of vehicle operational safety features corresponding to the presence of side remote objects;

establishing a vehicle operational criteria associated with each of said plurality of frontal vehicle operational safety features;

establishing a vehicle operational criteria associated with each of said plurality of side vehicle operational safety features;

one of said frontal and one of said side vehicle operation criteria corresponding to the same vehicle operational criteria;

determining a frontal sensor beam coverage areas for each of said plurality of frontal vehicle operational criteria or frontal vehicle operational safety features;

determining a side sensor beam coverage areas for each of said plurality of side vehicle operational criteria or side vehicle operational safety features;

receiving a status parameter representing the operational status of said vehicle; and

activating said sensor for scanning desired frontal and side sensor beam coverage areas when said status parameter meets one of said vehicle operational criteria.

18. A sensor for sensing a front and side of an automotive vehicle, said sensor comprising:

a housing;

a plurality of beams in said housing, each of said beams associated with a frontal or side coverage area, said coverage area including far, near, wide or narrow coverage; and

a controller for activating said respective frontal and side beams depending upon the activation of said automotive vehicle.

19. The sensor of claim 18, wherein one of said frontal or side beams is associated with the operational status of said vehicle.